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# PITFALLS OF A "LEAGUE OF NATIONS"

BY ALBERT J. BEVERIDGE

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SOME excellent and able men now urge that just as the States of the Union have been interlaced into a nation, with concord throughout its dominions, so the nations of the earth shall be similarly united to end strife among all mankind. Why, it is asked, if the States could unite into a nation, surrendering most of their sovereignty to the national Government, should not the various Governments of the world form a superstate to which each of these federated nations would yield a part of its sovereignty and obey the decrees of an international authority supreme over all of them?

This plan, passionately insisted upon under two or three titles, the favorite of which is, for the moment, The League of Nations, raises the greatest question which the American people have ever been called upon to answer.

If the analogy of the States agreeing among themselves to form a harmonious nation is to be strictly followed, certain results would be inevitable. For example, just as the States, in order to form a nation, gave up the right to pass tariff laws or immigration laws, so the nations comprising the international superstate would have to do the same thing. Indeed, certain foreign champions of this international arrangement urge this very fact as one of the principal reasons why a League of Nations should be established.

If this is not so, the analogy fails. The argument based upon a comparison of the union of the States into a nation, with the proposed union of the nations into a world government, would require us to imagine that the States agreed only that they would not fight one another, but still kept

the right to make tariffs against one another, to regulate or prohibit migration from one to another, to do the same thing with reference to commerce; and, in short, to act in every way as though each State was a sovereign nation. The States would have agreed not to make war among themselves, and yet would left open every subject that might cause hostilities. Is it not plain, then, that this analogy is false—even absurd?

The League can be established only by treaty. This treaty would bind each member-nation to make war anywhere and at any time the League decrees. If America becomes a member, we must, of course, repeal that provision of our Constitution which gives to Congress the exclusive power to declare war. This is admitted. Indeed, such an amendment was actually introduced in the Senate. Do we want to abolish that vital provision of our fundamental law? Do we wish to bind ourselves and our children forever to make war whether we or they want to or not? Even if we did not formally repeal that section of our Constitution, would not the result be the same as if we did repeal it?—since our honor would be pledged in the treaty to make war, and Congress would be morally compelled to declare it, as a matter of good faith to our allies, whenever and wherever a majority of them required it.

Of course, if the League treaty is not to bind each member to enforce the judgments of the League, then the treaty would amount merely to an agreement that the contracting nations would undertake to be good. And it may come to that in the end. Already the dispatches from Europe advise us that the League is to require no change in our Constitution, no limitation on our freedom of action—nothing, in short, to which stubbornly patriotic Americans can object. All we will be bound to do, apparently, will be to enter into a sort of general “understanding” to maintain the new governmental and territorial arrangements fixed by the international peace conference now sitting at Versailles.

So, although not exacting of us an agreement, in specific terms, to go to war whether we want to or not, yet is not the effect the same as if we did sign such a contract? For, having committed ourselves to act in concert with certain other nations, to uphold in the future the world adjustments established by the peace treaty, would we not be ac-

cused of "bad faith" and "cowardice" if we declined to pour out American blood and money for that purpose, should those adjustments ever be in danger of being upset?

Yet not one of these territorial and governmental changes affects us in any way. They are in Africa, in Asia, in Europe. Still, we are expected to go into a partnership of "good faith," a sort of "gentlemen's agreement," if nothing stronger can be secured from us, to see that the re-divisions of the earth are maintained. Can any American who cares for his own nation contemplate such a scheme without emotion?

As to the original project of an unlimited international superstate, so fervently proclaimed during the last three years, the only reason given for it is, that it may prevent wars by the amicable settlement of disputes. But, on the contrary, does not the plan contain the very seeds of strife? Assume the League in existence with big and little nations members of it. Suppose two of the larger nations differ radically on some subject which each honestly thinks vital to its well-being. The matter must be settled by a vote of the nations who are members of the League. If human nature has not been repealed, would not each of the contending Governments try to get as many votes as possible? Would not this result in—would it not compel—such international intrigue and corruption as the world has never seen? And if one of the disputants should prevail by a single vote or fraction of a vote, would the defeated nation and its associates submit? Or would there be a world-wide cry of fraud followed by resistance? Even if war did not result, would not the League dissolve, leaving behind it bitterness and suspicion more intense and long-lived than even some wars have produced?

As to the actual structure of the superstate, on what basis would it be erected? Would little nations have the same suffrage as big nations? Would Costa Rica have the same voting power as France? Serbia the same as Great Britain? Uruguay the same as the United States? Tibet the same as Japan? If not, what becomes of the principle that the rights and interests of little nations are as sacred as those of big nations? Since the protection of small nations is one of the main purposes of the proposed League, who are so well qualified to pass on their own safety and wellbeing as the little nations themselves?

But in case the lesser nations are to have only fractional votes, who shall decide what those fractions shall be? And would the small nations come into the League on fractional representation? If the little nations refuse to enter the League as inferiors, what is to become of their rights, interests, and honor, which it is one of the principal purposes of the League to protect? Or is the League to tell the little nations what is best for them, and, by force, make them submit to the League's opinion?

If this trifling problem should be solved to the full satisfaction and happiness of all nations, another small question arises: What proportion of the international army and navy which is to execute the decrees of the League shall each nation furnish? Shall this be determined upon the basis of population? If so, China would supply more men and ships than all of Europe, the United States, and Japan combined. Shall contributions to the "international police force" be determined by comparative wealth? If so, the American Nation must furnish the largest contingent. Or shall the rule of allotment be the degree of comparative intelligence? Or shall it be measured by the clearly defined and accurately established standard call "civilization?" In either case, who is to decide the relative intelligence and civilization of the nations? Would any nation agree that its people are less intelligent and civilized than others? Also, how shall the command of this international army and navy be settled?

But let us assume all these questions to be disposed of—as doubtless they readily can be—and the League to be in full and effective operation. What would be the province of the superstate, and what our duty in the matter of revolutions in any country? Governments are sometimes changed by revolutions; and revolution in one country sometimes causes war between other countries. For instance, the French Revolution caused the war between Great Britain and France that, in turn, resulted in the Napoleonic wars. Must the League, therefore, interfere with revolutions? If so, on which side?

The late Czar was the first authority in modern times to call an international council for the suppression of war. Suppose that gathering had resolved upon a League of Nations of which the United States, Great Britain and other nations, including Russia itself, were members. It would

have been the Government of the Czar that signed that treaty. When that Government was threatened with destruction by revolution, would it not have called, and have had the right to call, on its international partners to help preserve it?

Suppose a League of Nations had existed at the time of our Civil War. If it had intervened in that struggle does anybody doubt what the result would have been? Do we not know that we would today be two nations instead of one? Whoever doubts this should read European history as related to the struggle of the American Nation for existence.

But let us say that the supposed world-superstate agrees to have nothing to do with revolutions—although by so agreeing the very Governments forming the superstate may themselves be destroyed. Let us say that the League proposes to intervene, not when different parts of a nation are about to fight one another, but only when different nations are about to fight one another. If the combat cannot be prevented and hostilities begin, on which side will the League array itself?

If it is said that the superstate will act against the aggressor, how shall it determine which of the belligerents really is the aggressor, since every nation always claims that the other belligerent is the aggressor; and the decision must be made instantly if war is to be prevented. But sometimes it takes many years to settle the real cause of a war. Which nation was the aggressor in the Russo-Japanese War, or in the conflict between China and Japan? Each claimed at the time and still claims that the other was the aggressor.

Moreover, occasionally the real cause of conflict is not admitted by either belligerent, and could not and would not be submitted to any international court or league. For example, the fundamental cause of the Russo-Japanese War probably was the increase of population in Japan and the necessity for more territory where its people could live; while Russia's motive was her historic, natural—and perhaps justifiable—desire for ice-free ports. Yet this profound reason for the Russo-Japanese collision would not have been conceded by either of the two disputing nations, and could not have been settled by any international power. Suppose, then, that, since the League could not have dealt

with the problem, war came notwithstanding the League's existence. On which side would American soldiers and sailors have had to fight?

Since one of the objects of the superstate is to protect the territorial integrity, rights, and interests of small nations, what would we, as a member of the League, have been compelled to do in the war between Great Britain and the Allied Dutch Republics of South Africa? Or what would have been the League's action when Korea was absorbed by Japan? In our own history, would we have been permitted to wage war with Mexico? If not, what would today have been the situation of that enormous territory which now composes the States of California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona, and is peopled by the freest, happiest, most prosperous men and women on the globe?

Would we have been allowed to fight Spain? If not, what today would be the condition of Cuba, Porto Rico, and the Philippines? No such progress is recorded in history as has been made by the people of those islands since they came under American control. And all of them are under American control. Porto Rico and the Philippines are American possessions; and the American suzerainty over Cuba is the most perfect ever committed to paper.

Is not the proposed world-superstate an agreement to maintain perpetually, by arms if need be, the status of the world as it shall be at the time the League is formed? Do we not, as a member of that League, underwrite for all time to come the international status quo and guarantee to maintain it with American life and treasure? And is this wise or right either for ourselves or the world?

It is not impossible that the whole thing will taper down to a proposal for a league consisting of a permanent alliance of the United States and the three other leading nations. Already such a suggestion has been made. It is a variation of the "gentlemen's agreement" already mentioned. The world is to be "policed" and "kept in order" by the "Big Four." How Holland, Spain, Belgium, and the Scandinavian countries will welcome that scheme! Is it reasonable to expect enthusiastic submission from South America? And the attitude of Japan toward the project may be of interest. And none of the nations outside the combine is to be permitted to say a word about the matter—

they can come in on the terms prescribed by the "Big Four," or stay out.

But, in either case, the "Big Four" will attend to their affairs for them. Does not such a project as this suggested "League of Nations, Limited," appear somewhat fanciful, not to say unjust? Would it not create universal antagonism, jealousies, hatreds? And what possible advantage would America derive from it? Is it not plain that the "League of Nations, Limited" has most of the evils of an unlimited league and some that are even worse. Would it not involve us in expense impossible to estimate, and enmesh us in snares and troubles beyond human ability to forecast with certainty?

Another point may not be unworthy of mention in this period of "the self-determination of peoples." Whether the League takes in all nations, or only a few selected Governments, are the American people to be allowed to vote on this question which concerns them so profoundly? Are any people to be permitted to vote on it? Apparently not. The arrangement is to be made by the gentlemen in Paris, presented to our Senate in the form of a treaty, and put through without any expression of the people or their will in the premises. If it is said that this is the usual method of dealing with treaties, is not the answer that this is an unprecedented treaty? It resembles no other treaty we ever made except in one point: *When it is made, we must stand by it.*

*If we get into the League we cannot get out.* No matter how badly it works for us, no matter how much we may come to dislike it, we are bound, in honor, to remain in it. If, in desperation, we should break the treaty and release ourselves, would we not thereby invite war upon us by the other members of the League? Even if they generously refrained from attacking us, could they be expected ever to trust us again?

But whether we are to be bound to an alliance with many or few nations, what advantages in any direction would America derive from membership in a League of any kind? At the risk of "damnable iteration," that question should be asked ceaselessly. Or are American rights and interests unworthy of our consideration? If our own well-being is not to be eliminated from our thought, ought we not to ask and answer a few other obvious questions?



Take, for instance, our Mexican relations. That country adjoins us. There have been, are, and always will be more American citizens legitimately engaged in business in Mexico and a greater quantity of American capital legitimately invested there, than the citizens and capital of all other nations combined. For years we have endured peculiar, shocking, and indefensible—almost indescribable—outrages upon American citizens and property in Mexico; and this is likely to occur again.

As a member of an international League, could we do anything whatever to protect American lives, safeguard American property or maintain American rights in Mexico, without the consent of the other nations who are our fellow-members in the League? If it became necessary for us to establish the same relations with Mexico that we have with Cuba, could this be done without the sanction of the international superstate?

Or take the Monroe Doctrine, which concerns the Western Hemisphere and is vital to the development of it. Would not Japan, Great Britain, or Germany have as much to say as ourselves about what that doctrine means and what may and may not be done under it? If we undertake to help settle the disputes among the nations of Europe and Asia, do we not bind ourselves to allow them to have the same voice in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere?

If we, with other nations, underwrite the status of canals in the old world, do we not obligate ourselves that other nations shall, equally with us, control the Panama Canal?

Once more let us make the inquiry as to what beneficial result can come to us from membership in any international combination whatever? Would not the inevitable consequence be that we involve ourselves in racial and historic antagonisms and complications from which thus far we have kept ourselves free? Would we not surrender every advantage which our situation on the globe, our history, our one unbroken traditional policy, and our resources afford us? Would we not place ourselves in the position of an integral, physical part of the continents of Europe and Asia?

It is said that steam and electricity have eliminated the oceans and that nations no longer are separated by water barriers. Is this true? The English Channel is now as effective a bulwark to the United Kingdom as it ever was.

That narrow strip of water and a strong fleet have saved England from invasion for nearly a thousand years. From the military point of view, it would appear, then, that after all the Atlantic has not been abolished.

We are told that we must no longer be "isolated." How are we "isolated"? How have we ever been "isolated"? Not commercially. Not financially. Not socially. We have been "isolated" only in the political sense—only in the sense that we have not bound ourselves by alliance to mix up in the quarrels of others—only in the sense that we have attended to our own business. Is not that kind of "isolation" the very thing that is best for us and for the world? If so, why abandon it? Does anybody imagine that, if any European Nation were situated as we are, it would surrender its peculiar advantages?

The points that I have suggested are only a few of those involved in the present day recrudescence of the ancient scheme for a League of Nations. But do not the ones enumerated show that the international journey which we are asked to take is through an unexplored and perilous jungle?

Is it not better for the American people to advance along the highway of America's traditional foreign policy? That policy was formulated after years of thought, experience and consultation by all the wonderful company of constructive statesmen who laid the foundations of the American Nation. No such group of far-visioned men ever blessed with their wisdom any country at a given time. Call the roll of them—Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Adams, Madison, Marshall, and the others of that galaxy of immortals.

The foreign policy announced by Washington was the product of the combined and profoundly considered judgment of all these men. It was the only policy, foreign or domestic, on which all of them were united. On every other they disagreed. For that alone they stood as a single man. Several years after Washington formally declared this American policy, Jefferson restated it still more broadly and emphatically. Also that policy has been maintained from that day to this by every American statesman and every American political party.

For more than a hundred and thirty years the Ameri-

can Nation has progressed along the plain, safe course these men marked out. It has kept us from disastrous foreign entanglements and ruinous foreign complications. It has saved us hundreds of thousands of lives and hundreds of billions of dollars. Why leave it now to wander through a pathless wilderness of alien interests, racial hatreds, historic animosities?

Do not the wellbeing of a great people and the development of a mighty continent present problems hard enough to tax all the strength of the ablest men in the whole Republic? If the concerns of a few million people occupying a strip of seaboard engrossed all the energy, thought and time of men like "the fathers" whom I have just named, have any intellects now appeared capable of caring not only for the affairs of one hundred and ten million human beings covering an area that stretches from ocean to ocean, but also capable of adjusting all the differences of all the variegated peoples of the entire globe?

The situation of the American Nation is unique. Geographically it sits on the throne of the world. Its history is that of the evolution of a distinct, separate, and independent people. Its mission is no less than to create a new race on the earth and to present to mankind the example of that happiness and well-being which comes from progressive, self-disciplined liberty.

This was the faith of our fathers. By that faith ought we not still to abide?—the American Nation the supreme love of our hearts, the highest object of our effort and our thought—the American Nation free of hand and unmanacled of foot, marching steadily onward toward the destiny to which it is entitled by reason of its place on the globe, the genius of its people, and its orderly institutions of freedom.

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